



The United States Agency for International Development

Relaxed (Rapid) & Participatory Appraisal

**Training for Women's Empowerment Strategic Objective Team
Kathmandu, Nepal
January - February, 1996**

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TRIP REPORT: WORKSHOP IN KATHMANDU, NEPAL

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NOTE: Methodological annex includes a complete record of the sessions held during the workshop.

INTRODUCTION

I conducted a "just-in-time" training workshop in Kathmandu, Nepal from January 29 through February 13, 1996 on relaxed appraisal (RA) and participatory appraisal (PRA) methodologies. This was attended by twelve FSNs and twelve employees of Peace Corps and international and local NGOs. All worked together to design the customer survey for the Empowerment of Women Strategic Objective (SO3), and most will be able to continue as team members for the study immediately following the workshop. The FSNs presented the design created by workshop participants for this customer survey first to the Director and Deputy Director and then to the entire mission staff on February 15 and 16. Most participants will be able to work well as team members on participatory studies for both design and evaluation activities in the future; some will be able to supervise and train others.

Participants modeled the linkages among partners that USAID seeks to foster. Among the FSNs were both professionals and support staff from throughout the mission. There were two peace corps volunteers, two from The Asia Foundation, two from PACT, one from World Education, one from IRIS, one from SUSS, one from LOGOS, one from IIDS, and one from Save the Children, US.

SO3 -- The Empowerment of Women Strategic Objective

When the Mission was reorganized under re-engineering, Strategic Objective 3 was created by placing on-going projects in income generation and literacy (each with its own project paper prepared by a separate office), plus a small activity in legal literacy, under a single heading: Empowerment of Women. The SO was thus "retrofitted" to existing projects with distinct foci, different target groups and separate geographical areas of operation.

The customer survey was needed to refocus the SO around an integrated theme, to coordinate activities and reach a well-targeted population. Questions remain about the emphasis on empowerment in contrast with the pre-existing themes, and about the manner and degree to which existing projects will, or will not, be blended in a newly formulated SO.

Re-engineering in the Nepal Mission

The Nepal mission is not a CEL, so its work in reengineering is recent. Where CELs were given a year and a half to discuss the new management structures they wanted to adopt, Nepal, like other non-CELs, has had to reengineer hurriedly while coping with severe financial uncertainty, including furloughs. Training in teamwork skills and other support has been curtailed due to budgetary constraints. People are anxious about losing their jobs, worried that their past efforts to organize effective programs will be jeopardized, and unclear about how much authority can be delegated among offices within USAID and to partner organizations.

Major Themes of the Workshop:

The Nepal workshop evolved from similar workshops in Bangladesh and El Salvador in March and August, 1995 (see Sweetser, Trip Report, April 1995). This report both describes the content of the Nepal workshop, and sets out the training strategy subsequently employed in Egypt and Jordan.

The workshop is primarily about two research methods, RA and PRA, but it is also about fundamental ways of doing business in a reengineered, learning-based USAID. It provides a model of how individuals can work as members of teams to incorporate customer focus into development activities. It seeks to empower participants to be creative learners and, subsequently, to promote attainment of sustainable results by applying these methods. Proper and successful application of the methods themselves requires teamwork among actively learning individuals. Content and learning context are thus reflexively structured and mutually reinforcing. A supportive training environment promotes risk taking and facilitates experiential as well as didactic learning.

Participants study and practice both RA and PRA methods, including the fundamental skills of observing and listening, carrying out semi-structured interviews, and leading communities through self-analytic exercises using mapping and diagramming. They then plan a customer survey or evaluation, and/or redesign a proposed development activity, incorporating the methods, to begin applying RA and PRA to real work situations. Teamwork is addressed at the start and repeatedly during the workshop, including creation of a team charter. Participants increasingly work in small groups as they conduct, analyze and evaluate their work, and then report on their efforts to the full group. Learning, partly for review and evaluation, partly with an eye to training others, is explicitly discussed at the end of the course. Participants are asked to design workshops that they might later sponsor, and finally to prepare and make a presentation to the host mission about the workshop.

The Learning Organization

The model for a reengineered USAID is the Learning Organization. This presumes people who are open to learning, who work as members of teams that are focused on specific goals, who are empowered to take reasonable risks. It is therefore flexible, efficient, innovative, focused and forward-looking. Establishing a learning organization must start with the people who make it up -- they must be encouraged and supported. Ultimately they will be sustained by the learning context, just as the learning organization is perpetuated by the creativity and initiative of the individuals who constitute it.

Qualitative Research Methods

Relaxed Appraisal, RA, also known as rapid appraisal, and Participatory (Rural) Appraisal, PRA, are part of a continuum of qualitative appraisal methodologies in which superior observing, listening and learning are carried out by members of quality teams to quickly and reliably develop understanding of a social issue. Rather than assisting with a process of amassing more information in accordance with a pre-defined structure and content, these methods facilitate identification

of factors that were not clear prior to the start of the assessment. They provide an answer to the question: "How do I find out what I do not know that I need to know?".

They are grounded in recognition that real learning involves overcoming prior assumptions. This requires the courage to listen acutely to hear not only the superficial content of others' speech, but to move toward understanding of how other people perceive their world, to discern the logic in their conception of reality. They recognize that all intercultural communication requires mutual accommodation of the parties involved: the listener must try to be conscious of his or her own culturally-conditioned expectations and the way these tend to affect his or her ability to listen well.

Culture both facilitates and limits understanding between people. Every competent adult has internalized and uses myriad bits of cultural learning every day -- in speaking a language, in behaving properly for his or her age and status, in interpreting reality. In cross-cultural encounters, each person's culture leads him or her to judge the other and contribute to the interaction in their own terms. The more conscious people are of the way their cultural baggage affects their interactions, the better they are able to discard their "automatic" judgements of others and discern what their interlocutors are trying to communicate.

Any person with specialized training -- an expert -- has an additional 'layer' of learning (an extra dose of cultural conditioning) that is accorded high value by his or her society. Though it may be only a small part of the person's overall cultural conditioning, expertise is regarded as special, so the person tends to value it highly and identify strongly with the perspective and social role associated with it. The additional learning plus the greater emotional attachment to it mean that it is harder for an unself-critical expert to truly listen well.

Relaxed Appraisal (RA)

Relaxed appraisal is an iterative learning process requiring triangulation and teamwork. Semi-structured, or conversational, interviewing (of which focus groups is a subset) is the primary technique. Following background research, team members engage in discussion to clarify their expectations (or 'prejudices'), and agree upon issues to be explored, at least on a preliminary basis. They also make decisions about what types of interviewees they will seek out, using purposive sampling to ensure that relevant groups are represented. Then they proceed to talk with people, working in pairs or small teams.

When individuals with contrasting backgrounds and training trust and cooperate with each other as team members, they are able to compare their individual observations and interpretations of conversations they have had with others in small groups. They can compare these conversations with information gathered before the interviewing started, and compare what they are learning with what they expected before the interviewing started. They thus triangulate among themselves and among sources of insight and information to enrich the learning process. As a consequence of spending as much time seriously discussing their work with one another as they spend conducting semi-structured interviews, they can together refine the methods and focus of their inquiry as their understanding grows. An intensively interactive, iterative process thus characterizes relaxed appraisal.

Participatory Appraisal (PRA)

Two dimensions characterize the difference between RA and PRA (*Note: Some people feel strongly about the delineation of RA, PRA, and RRA or rapid rural appraisal. I feel that it is better to focus on the qualities that are essential for successful use of all qualitative methods, to select a balance of techniques that best suit the society or context one is studying, and avoid a tendency to academic delimitation of schools or approaches.*) These are a) the use of material objects rather than reliance solely upon verbal exchange, and b) the degree to which power is shifted from the outsiders to members of communities. In RA, as in traditional survey work, the interviewers have control over the information that they take away from their encounters. They retain the authority to analyze what they learn and then plan programs and activities to address other peoples' problems.

PRA significantly shifts the power relationship between outsiders and insiders. It empowers community members (rural or urban) by allowing them to handle and manipulate materials and interact with one another as they clarify their perspective as a group. It encourages broad participation by illiterate as well as literate people by using materials all are comfortable with. Residents contribute categories (from previously unrecognized subspecies of plants to important values of which outsiders were unaware), experiment with ways of representing their reality, participate in analysis, prioritize their problems, enumerate the resources available, and plan actions that they wish to undertake to address their problems and allows them to define the assistance they require. Thus PRA does more than provide information to the outsider: it

contributes directly to fostering confidence among those who may normally be excluded from participation while it builds the capacity of people to work together to address their own problems and interests.

Researchers using PRA act as catalysts and facilitators not as traditional leaders. They "pass the stick" and "sit down" -- they observe and counsel but relinquish much authority so community members can proceed in their own way. One consequence is that the analysis and decision making are really relevant to the community members, rather than suiting outside donor agendas. Facilitators recognize that residents are the experts on their own situation, and quite capable of doing the entailed analytical tasks. They foster interactive learning and creativity within the community, just as facilitating PRA supports their own open learning.

It can be used very effectively for design, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (which is also redesign and new planning). Because community members have responsibility for the direction of development, and for negotiating with others to ensure that necessary support is provided, democratic or participatory social development as well as technological change can result from donor-supported activities. The skills that are necessary for continued community decision making in the future are imparted through a method that ensures far higher quality research at the commencement of a development effort.

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GOALS OF THE WORKSHOP:

The primary goals of the workshop were to gain experience-grounded skills as well as didactic knowledge of two qualitative assessment methodologies: RA (Relaxed Appraisal) and PRA (Participatory (rural) Appraisal). Because adults learn best by experimenting rather than passively listening, field trials were included on: observation (two hours); semi-structured interviewing, followed by analysis (two days); and working with members of a community using mapping and creation of matrices and other charts to help community members identify, prioritize, and analyze their problems and resources, plus discussion and evaluation this work (three to four days).

Participants then designed the customer survey for the Empowerment of Women Strategic Objective. This entailed making judgements about the applicability and adaptability of the methods in various settings: urban as well as rural locations, working with women as well as male interlocutors, and different program phases -- implementation as well as design and planning. We also considered the use of the methods for monitoring and evaluation.

Participants also learned about working in highly functional teams by practicing as well as discussing relevant issues. They evaluated the types of learning they had experienced in the workshop as the basis for considering how they would structure their own workshop to train others in these methods and their applications.

In addition, discussions about reengineering and identification of customers will provide a current USAID context for the training.

Note: For a complete record of the discussions throughout the workshop, see the accompanying methodological annex.

Syllabus

Day 1: Monday, January 29

- Introductions
- Syllabus overview
- Background: Re-engineering, Participation, Customers
- Concept of Team -- goals, rules of operation (equity, no such thing as a dumb question!, monitoring strategy using agendas etc.)
- Team formation exercises

Afternoon:

- Exercise: fantasy of travel to newly discovered valley, listing of expectations -- exploration of implications of cultural expectations, different patterns of language use, different connotations of words in common
- Introduction to qualitative research methods, rapid appraisal, participatory appraisal (mapping, etc.)
- Customer identification and analysis
- Logistics: information about field trips etc.
- Homework assignment on observation: "New Eyes"
- Check Out

Day 2: Tuesday, January 30

- Teamwork Revisited
- Detailed discussion of rapid appraisal types of questions -- with practice!! exploration of pre-suppositions held by team members (or, objectification of own models)
- At some good time -- everyone travel to some market? where there are lots of tables and chairs where people eat and talk to carry out second try at looking with new eyes -- LUNCH?
- Discussion of "New Eyes" exercise implications of cultural habits discussion of feelings about being an observer (this ties in with more team building!)
- Listening -- discussion and exercises
- Mapping/diagramming exercise
- Information about on-going programs in Nepal mission of relevance to interview/trip planning
- Summation, check out

Day 3: Wednesday, January 31

- Teamwork Revisited
- Group interview methods
- More practice interviewing
- Listening exercise
- Note taking strategies
- Finalization of prompt sheet with themes for conversational interviewing practice
- Logistics for field trials
- Discussion/comparison of assessment and evaluation

Day 4: Thursday, February 1

- Field trial: conversational interviews pertaining to project not too far from mission possibly a project well underway, nearing evaluation
- Afternoon spent analyzing, criticizing and evaluating the experience in small groups
- Revisions of prompt sheet for second day of field trials of interviewing

Day 5: Friday, February 2

- Field trial: Conversational interviews same project, new strategies developed by team members
- Afternoon: analysis, criticism, evaluation

Day 6: Monday, February 5

- Review/reflection on learning about rapid appraisal
- Participatory mapping and diagramming for research, design, evaluation and monitoring processes
- Mapping/diagramming exercise
- Logistics and planning for field trip

Day 7: Tuesday, February 6

- Briefing on the community where we will be working
- Planning for sequencing of mapping and diagramming work
- Afternoon: travel to Bharatpur
- Evening: walk around, chat as appropriate, make notes

Day 8: Wednesday, February 7

- Mapping exercises in morning
- Afternoon: meeting to report out and review, analyze, criticize, evaluate, reformulate plans for next day
- As appropriate: walk around in the evening, chat with people, keep notes on interactions

Day 9: Thursday, February 8

- mapping exercises continue, ranking, prioritization
- Bring small groups / men and women together to compare maps/diagrams/prioritizations they have made
- Reporting out, review, critique, analysis, evaluation...

Day 10: Friday, February 9

- Convene preliminary meeting with community leaders and some of those involved in mapping exercises? Help them work toward planning as a follow-up to the analysis they did during the map making
- Return to Kathmandu
- Meet to discuss and evaluate, or, ask each person to think seriously about certain aspects of the experience over the weekend

Day 11: Monday, February 12

- Teamwork revisited
- Focused evaluation of participatory appraisal experience
 - review and clarification of experience by different groups
 - what we learned
 - what we left behind
 - what worked/did not work so well
 - implications for women's activities in that community
 - implications for women's activities in other communities
- Rapid appraisal vs. participatory rural appraisal
- Their uses for design, monitoring and evaluation
- Their place in the re-engineered USAID
- The importance of culture in development work

Day 12: Wednesday, February 13

- Passing it on: Reflection on the Process of Learning
- Teamwork - it's importance in this workshop specific features, how they supported this
- Small groups, everyone reporting out to others
- Rapid Appraisal - review
- working toward planning training programs in home countries -- discussion of how this training was organized -- how transferable it is, et al.
- Report to full mission
- Presentation of certificates

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VIDEOS:

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